

Biblical Justice

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 September 2014

Preacher: Andy Bevan

[0 : 00] A very warm welcome to you all. Thank you for the warm welcome that I have received this morning. My name is Andy, as I've said already.

And it's a real pleasure to be with you this morning, to sharing a little bit about the work of IJM, or International Justice Mission, and more than that, sharing about God's heart for justice.

A key theme that we see throughout Scripture, and very poignantly in our Sam that Derek read for us this morning.

I met with Derek and Katrina a few months ago now, and it was a real pleasure to chat a little bit about what role justice has in Christian discipleship.

And I think in a world that is particularly our context here, that is becoming more and more hostile towards God's word, and perhaps traditional evangelistic techniques.

[1 : 05] I think something that the Church throughout Scotland has looked at as an opportunity to share God's heart, and the Gospel, is through serving and meeting social need.

So it's a real pleasure to be sharing about that this morning. I work for International Justice Mission, and very briefly what we do as an organization is really responding to the problem of violence that there is in the world, particularly in the developing world.

And there are many, many people in our world that are vulnerable to violence on a daily basis. And we have a call in Scripture as Christians to do something about that.

So I'm delighted to be speaking this morning. So firstly, a few comments on our Sam today. For those of you that know your Sam's, and I presume there's a lot of you in the free church, I was connected with St Peter's free church for a short while, and many of my good friends went there when I was studying in Dundee's.

So very much know of the free church's connections to the Sam's. But this Sam is an interesting one. In the original Hebrew text, Sam's 9 and 10 were considered as 1, because they very much contain similar themes.

[2 : 30] Sam 10 is known as an acrostic Sam, i.e. it picks up immediately where Sam 9 leaves off.

So some of the similarities between the two Sam's both refer to God's interest in the oppressed, both mention times of trouble that the Israelites were going through.

Both call on God to arise against this, and both are sure that God will not forget the afflicted. There are some differences, and that is why in our Bible today they are separate.

Sam 9 is very much a song of praise and thanksgiving, written by David. And in Sam 10, although we don't have the author of this Sam, we can presume it is probably David.

Sam 10 is largely a lament, so quite a different genre, quite a different, I guess, feel to the Sam. So just really to highlight where we're going today.

[3 : 42] From the perspective of this Sam, and also from the perspective of IJM's work, and some of the issues that we see in the world, we're going to be looking at the reality of violence.

We're then going to ask the question of where is God in this, something that many of us, I'm sure, have asked at times, and certainly people that don't share a faith with us often ask.

Then moving on to consider where are God's people in responding to this, and then just concluding with a few comments. So firstly, the problem of violence.

This is something that we see painted quite dramatically in this Sam, in the first 11 verses, verses 1 to 11. We see the ways in which wicked people make the weak suffer for their gain.

I'm not too sure what boy it was, but the comment that the boy made in the kids talk was right on.

Like wherever there is injustice, there's always someone that's wanting to gain on behalf of that.

[4 : 49] And that is what we see in this passage. There are wicked who are most likely to be faithless, wealthy Israelites, and we see the poor who are poor and defenseless, Israelites, and

perhaps people of other faith as well.

We see throughout this, the first part of this Sam, that the wicked are boastful, they are greedy, they renounce and revile the Lord as we read in verse 3.

They feel secure from any form of divine judgment in verses 4 to 6 and verse 11. And they look to destroy the innocent and advance their own interests.

And we can see that in verses 8 to 10. Does this sound familiar? This is definitely not just something confined to biblical times.

We see this common model throughout the world, whether it's here in Edinburgh on our own streets, or whether it is in different parts of the world.

[5 : 55] You only need to look at the news, particularly now. It is particularly bad for violence just now in our world to see that this is not just a problem of biblical times.

All of illustrations from our work and some issues in the world today, approximately one in five women are likely to be a victim of sexual abuse during their lifetime, a shocking statistic.

And in certain parts of the world where we work, that statistic is more like one in two. And for example, in Bolivia, where you have this statistic, and where you have actions that are against the law, a perpetrator of those actions is statistically more likely to slip in the shower and die than they are to be brought to account for that crime.

So we see a very similar theme to hear, people carrying out violence without any regard for being held to account for that crime. Something that you might be aware of through listening to the news, particularly in the last couple of years, is the issue of sex trafficking.

Human trafficking globally is the trafficking of people, people of flesh and blood, daughters, sons, mothers, fathers, trafficking from one place to another, really for their exploitation and for profit of other people.

[7 : 23] It is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world, and it is a conservative estimate of two million children.

Children are currently held in the sex trade throughout the world. Again, similar themes here of violence and a lack of regard for the results of that.

And finally, another final example, modern day slavery, very much connected to human trafficking. But today, again, there is a conservative estimate that there is nearly 30 million people held in different forms of slavery, which is more than any other point of time in history, including the height of the transatlantic slave trade.

During the 400 years of the slave trade, approximately 11 million people were taken out of Africa to go to the Americas, which was absolutely shocking. But to think that three times that figure live in slavery today is quite a sobering thought in many regards.

And again, in India, there is a conservative estimate that 15 million people are held in slavery. And despite this being against the law and those numbers, you are statistically more likely to be struck by lightning and killed than you are to be brought to account for that crime.

[8 : 46] So again, we see very similar patterns in today, in the world in which we live in, to the model in this Sam.

So it's very much a reality of violence that has existed throughout history. You might well ask the question, where is God in all of this?

And this is a question that came up during the Sam a number of times. So right from the start, the Samist writes, why, oh Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? Later in the Sam, the wicked then say they have no room for God in verse 4. Nothing will ever shake us in verse 6. No one will ever do us harm in verse 6. And then God will never notice us in verse 11.

So where is God is perhaps a fair question to ask. And as I said at the start, it is a question that during my time as a Christian, I have probably been asked most by people that aren't Christians.

[9 : 55] This is going on in the world, where is God in this? So it's a very common question. It's also a question that you might ask for Jamie.

Jamie was one of our clients that we worked with in Rwanda in Kigali. Where was God for Jamie when she was repeatedly abused at the age of 14 by her husband and one of his friends?

Where was God when she was locked in her bedroom when her house was set on fire, leaving her disabled, as you can see in that picture?

Oops. Where was God when Sandana, a little boy along with his family, were held in slavery in a brick kiln by these two men?

Where was God when Catherine at the age of 13 was trafficked into a brothel in Philippines?

[10:57] So where is God, the question again? In order to come to an answer of this, we need to look at the Bible. And I think that act will actually show us that God is very much present.

In the Psalm before in Psalm 9 verse 18 it says, But God will never forget the needy, the hope of the afflicted will never perish.

The prophet Isaiah, when he's giving the prophecy of the suffering servant, in verse 53 verse 3 says, He was despised and rejected by others, a man suffering and familiar with pain.

Throughout the Gospels we see the account of the incarnation, Jesus, the Godman, God in person, coming to a world that is broken and needy.

We saw him relating to people that were suffering and were weak and were broken. In the current passage in verse 17, you Lord hear the desire of the afflicted, you encourage them and you listen to their cry.

[12:08] This is a theme that's also echoed in the Exodus story when God appears to Moses in the burning bush. In this fascinating encounter we see that God sees, he hears and he feels the cries of his people held in slavery in Egypt.

And interestingly in this passage as well we also receive a call from God to Moses to do something about this. So where is God? He is in the rubble of our broken lives.

He is sitting in the dust with us as our life has been flipped upside down. He is with you in your darkest moments and he is with you as you enter difficult situations to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

So therefore perhaps rather than asking the question where is God, the better question might be where are God's people? Consider the injustices that are inflicted in Psalm 10.

Consider the injustices that I've shared about the work of some of the situations that IJM have come up against. What if God's people stood up for these people going through these trials?

[13:28] What if they were to give those people a voice that enabled them to get through the situation that they were facing? What if they were to remind those people that God is very much with them and alive with them in those situations?

Throughout history we can see Christians that have been influenced by their faith to respond to these issues. To name a few we have William Wilberforce who stood up in the minority in the British Parliament to see the end of the slave trade throughout the British Empire at that time.

We see Dutsch Bonhoeffer who is a legend in my book and he stood up against the Nazi regime and spoke out against that.

Another legend Martin Luther King Jr. who stood up for victims of racial prejudice during the civil rights movement in the States. All of these people were Christians, all of these people were motivated to do it because they read in the Bible that God is passionate about his people responding to these issues.

So why should we respond? Just two thoughts on this. One being a moral obligation, we are all people created in God's image and now more than ever in history we are connected to people around the world.

[15:03] A tier fund have a great quote that I read a few months ago that says, the average breakfast has travelled 5,000 miles to get to your plate. So before you even leave the house in the morning you're connected with someone 5,000 miles away.

Martin Luther King again says whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. So we definitely have a moral obligation because we're connected to people whether it's people here in Edinburgh or people on the other side of the world.

And there very much is a biblical basis for this as well and to share just a few verses that stand out in this. In Psalms 2 verse 10 says we are God's handy work created in Christ to do good works.

And what do we understand by these good works? This is something that has caused division whereby some people have thought that they can achieve salvation through good works and other people think it's by faith alone, very much by faith alone.

And Tim Keller outlines that we are saved by faith alone but not by a faith that remains alone, which I think is really helpful in I guess explaining what good works might mean.

[16:19] And that is from the book *Generous Justice*. If you've not read that it's an excellent piece of work by Keller. To look a little bit more at what these good works might involve, the classic text from the prophet Micah 6.8 after seeing all the religious practices of the pious religious Israelites at that point.

He says these words, he has shown you people what is good and what does the Lord require of you to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

And then finally in 1 John 3 16 to 17, one of my favourite passages of scripture, it says this is how we know what love is.

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If any of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you?

So we very much have a moral obligation to respond to injustice as well as a biblical mandate to respond.

[17:31] So what of Jamie Sundana and Catherine who I shared with earlier? Jamie is now thriving. IJM's lawyers represented her in court and received justice for her case against the perpetrators of those actions.

She entered into IJM's aftercare and received counselling and trauma therapy as well as physical therapy to enable her to get back up on her feet.

An interesting story in this is that IJM's office in Rwanda has a driver and the driver always had to carry Jamie around. And now Jamie says to the driver, I'll carry you because I can walk much better now. So it's a real story of transformation.

Sundana, this is the boy that was held along with his family in slavery and he is now along with his sister enjoying a life that every child should enjoy, drawing pictures and playing outside.

And then we see Catherine, the 14-year-old that was trafficked into a brothel. She is an amazingly strong woman and an operation conducted by IJM and the local police ensured her rescue and her restoration.

[18:54] And she is now a woman that comes alongside people that have gone through similar experiences as she went through. So responding to these matters should be the natural overflow of the faith that we have in God.

We also realise that these issues, whether it's the ones in the psalms, in the psalms or the ones that I've explained today, these are big issues and we can't do them alone.

So we very much need God in these. In closing, just three thoughts. Just to reinforce that God sees, feels and hears the cries of the oppressed.

May that be an encouragement to you in the situations that you might be going through in your lives. May it also be an encouragement in the conversations that you have with perhaps friends that aren't Christians who question God's whereabouts.

May it be an encouragement to you in those situations. Secondly, we are called to go. God calls his people to go in his power to seek justice where there is none.

[20:11] And I think the concept of justice is one that has carried a lot of baggage, in my opinion, for too long in the church in Scotland and the UK.

There are definite things in our history that are not good in that regard. But I believe that the church in Scotland needs to respond to this, not only to meet the needs, physical needs of people, but I also believe that it is such a powerful witness to people that do not yet have a faith.

One of my colleagues who was a career human rights activist and for most of her life was a staunch atheist says this, that radical courageous, outrageous notion that God sees cruelty and demands that those who love him do something about it was the beginning of the end of my intellectual defences against the concept of a kind God in a hurting world.

Again, Tim Keller in his book, *Generous Justice* says, if the world sees the global church doing justice, then the world will get interested in the faith that we are seeking to share.

So justice as well as meeting social needs provides a very, very powerful apologetic in an unbelieving world. And then finally, God calls us to respond. That might be through ways getting involved with stuff that IGM do.

[21:45] It might be other organisations that are doing things here in Edinburgh. It might be other global organisations as well. But just to close, three ways that you might like to respond.

You all, I think, would have received this petition card on your way into church this morning. This is our current advocacy campaign that as an organisation we are supporting.

And I won't go into all the boring details of it, but the United Nations publishes goals to eradicate poverty every 15 years.

And in 2015 they are coming up with new goals. And what this petition is asking is actually to put the issue of violence at the forefront of those.

So more information is on the back of the cards. Also on those cards you are given the opportunity to receive some of our newsletters or our prayer updates.

[22 : 49] We have thousands of prayer partners across the UK that join us in our work. IGM is very much centred and rooted on prayer. In our working day we have an hour dedicated to prayer, half an hour at the start and half an hour in the middle.

And this is something that we invite you and invite our supporters to engage with. Because it is stuff that we cannot do ourselves. We need help in that.

And then finally I invite you to share this message as well. I believe that conversations can lead to amazing things happening for the Gospel, for the furthering of God's Kingdom.

So I challenge you to share with your colleagues, your family, your friends, some of these things that I have shared about today, about global injustice. And maybe why as a Christian, if you are one, why are you motivated to respond to that?

So thank you very much. Let me close in prayer and then I'll hand back to Derek.

[24 : 04] Father, I thank you that you are a God of justice. I thank you for your word. And no matter where we look in it, whether it is the books of law, the Psalms, the wisdom, literature, the Gospels, the prophets, the letters, we see this thread of justice, you being a God that enters into our everyday situations and wants to be with us and journey with us in those situations.

I thank you that we also see a clear call for your people to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today.

I pray that whatever that might look like for the people in this building this morning, I pray that you would speak to each of us about that. Give us a burning desire. Perhaps it was one of the statistics that we heard.

Perhaps it was one of the passages that we read, showing us your heart. Give us a desire to follow that up and journey with you and seeing what that might look like.

So Father, I thank you for this morning. I thank you for your word. It is such a gift to us. And thank you for the chance to look at it and study it this morning.

[25 : 29] I lift this up to you in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.